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1 55. (New) The computer program of claim 44, wherein the records of the records of  
2 the database further include an expiration date for an associated pre-paid airline ticket to expire.

1 56. (New) The computer program of claim 44, further operable to receive the  
2 identifier being uniquely associated with a pre-paid airline ticket and determine whether the pre-  
3 paid airline ticket has expired based on the associated expiration date.--

**REMARKS**

Favorable reconsideration of this application is respectfully requested.

Claims 1-16 and 34-56 remain pending in the present application.

Claims 1-11, 14-16, 34-38, 41, and 44-49 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(a) as being anticipated by Walker et al. (U.S. Patent 5,897,620), hereinafter Walker.

Claims 12-13 and 39-40 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Walker et al. in view of Oneda (U.S. Patent 5,953,705), hereinafter Oneda.

Independent claims 1, 34, and 44 have been amended. New claims 50-56 have been added. No new matter has been introduced.

Applicant thanks the Examiner and his supervisor for conducting an Examiner Interview on Thursday, January 30, 2003. The interview appeared to be mutually beneficial to address the concerns of the claim language of the pending application. During the Interview, the Examiners raised a concern of the definition of "unspecified geographic flight parameter" being unclear. Applicant has addressed this concern by amending independent claims 1 and 34 to recite a "geographic flight parameter being unspecified". Applicant respectfully submits that neither of the terms "geographic flight parameter" and "unspecified" are unclear or undefined within the

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originally filed application as the term "geographic flight parameter" has been described in several locations within the specification, claims, and drawings (cites identified below) and the term "unspecified" is to be interpreted in its plain, ordinary meaning as intended to be used in the originally filed application.

Applicant's claimed invention is generally directed to an article or pre-paid airline ticket that **may be used by purchasers to book flights at later dates**. The pre-paid airline ticket may be generic in the sense that parameters often associated with airline tickets may be **unspecified**. The parameters included on the pre-paid airline tickets may include both geographic flight parameters and non-geographic flight parameters, where the geographic flight parameters include a departure and destination location (e.g., airport or region) (see, for example, page 11, lines 2-3 and 16-18; FIGURE 2A; and dependent claim 6). Each pre-paid airline ticket includes an identifier that uniquely identifies the prepaid airline ticket and is "operable to be utilized by the customer in booking a flight". Additionally, an expiration date may be applied to the pre-paid airline ticket to indicate the date that the pre-paid airline ticket expires. After such date, a customer or holder of the pre-paid airline ticket may no longer utilize the pre-paid airline ticket in booking a flight. A database may be utilized to maintain the information associated with the pre-paid airline ticket. The information (e.g., identifier) stored in the database may be used for booking a flight selected by the customer or ticket holder.

The pre-paid airline ticket may be issued to the purchaser for later use (i.e., booking of a flight). In booking a flight with the pre-paid airline ticket having an unspecified geographic flight parameter, the purchaser may utilize the identifier uniquely identifying the pre-paid airline ticket to book a flight. In booking the flight, the **customer may select an available flight and**

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provide the identifier the pre-paid airline ticket may be updated to specify the geographic flight parameters that were previously unspecified.

Walker is generally directed to the sale of airline tickets having specified geographic flight parameters that are selected by the airlines (abstract, lines 1-3). Walker teaches a system and method that provides a purchaser with flexibility to allow the airlines to select a time and flight to schedule the purchaser. In purchasing the airline ticket, the purchaser specifies both a departure and destination location (see, for example, col. 3, lines 3-4; col. 3, lines 14-15). As cited by the Examiners during the Interview, “the flexibilities required of the unspecified-time traveler need not be limited to a departure time” and “may include the airline, the departing airport, the destination airport” (col. 3, lines 39-44). However, the “unspecified-time ticket ... is an official airline ticket that represents a seat of an actual flight to be determined later, by an airline 100, for a traveler-specified itinerary including the origin and destination locations together with the travel dates” (col. 4, lines 50-55).

With regard to the rejection of claims 1-11, 14-16, 34-38, 41, and 44-49 under 35 U.S.C. 102, Applicant has amended independent claims 1, 34, and 44 to clarify Applicant’s invention. Specifically, claim 1 has been amended to recite that the “identifier”, which uniquely identifies the pre-paid airline ticket, is “operable to be utilized by the customer to book a flight”. The identifier may be used by the customer to book a flight in a variety of different transactions, such as calling via a telephone to book a flight, swiping a card through a card reader to book the flight, entering into an entry field on webpage, etc. (page 13, lines 11-18; FIG. 2B, identifier 66; FIG. 2C, identifier 86). By contrast, Walker describes an unspecified-time ticket that does not teach or suggest an identifier uniquely identifying the ticket that may be utilized by the customer to book a flight as Walker requires that the **airline** selects the traveler. By contrast, as indicated

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in the Office Action dated April 2, 2002, on page 3, second paragraph, Walker describes an identifier associated with the seat allocation database (245, Fig. 2 and col. 10, lines 7-15 of Walker). The seat allocation database of Walker appears to include flight and seat availability of flights, which has little, if any, association with the unspecified-time ticket of Walker, and does not include an identifier associated with the ticket for use in booking a flight. Therefore, Walker does not teach or suggest Applicant's amended claimed invention.

Independent claim 34 has been amended and is directed to a method for providing pre-paid airline tickets, including storing ticket options in a database. Each ticket option includes an associated unique identifier. The ticket options are presented to a customer and a ticket selection is received from the customer. As amended, a pre-paid airline ticket is provided to the customer, where the pre-paid airline ticket includes "a record of the unique identifier "operable to be utilized by the customer to book a flight"". By contrast, as previously discussed, Walker does not teach or suggest an identifier with the unspecified-time ticket that is used by the purchaser to book a flight as Walker requires that the airline, not the passenger, select the flight for the purchaser of the ticket. Therefore, Walker does not teach or suggest an identifier "operable to be utilized by the customer to book a flight". Accordingly, Applicant respectfully requests that the rejection of independent claim 34 under 35 USC 102 be withdrawn. Claims 35-38 and 41 depend from independent claim 34 and should be allowable for at least the same reasons.

Independent claim 44 has been amended for clarification purposes and is directed to a computer program for providing pre-paid airline tickets using a pre-paid ticket identifier database. The database includes records having fields including (1) an identifier field that uniquely identifies a pre-paid airline ticket and (2) geographic flight parameter fields, where at least one of the geographic flight parameter fields includes a geographic flight parameter that is

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unspecified. Again, Walker does not teach or suggest an identifier associated with the unspecified-time ticket that is operable to be used by a customer to book a flight as Walker requires that the airline select a flight for the customer. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully requests that the rejection of independent claim 44 under 35 USC 102 be withdrawn. Claims 45-49 and new claims 55-56 depend from independent claim 34 and should be allowable for at least the same reasons.

With regard to the rejection under 35 USC 103(a) of claims 12-13 and 39-40, Applicant respectfully traverses the rejection. Claims 12-13 and 39-40 stand rejected under 35 USC 103 as being unpatentable over Walker in view of Oneda. Oneda generally describes a ticketless system and processing method for issuance of an airplane ticket using an integrated circuit (IC) card. In one embodiment, the system is a stand-alone machine that accepts the IC card and utilizes the personal information stored on the IC card to issue the airline ticket having a magnetic stripe. Oneda, however, does not teach or suggest a pre-paid airline ticket having an identifier uniquely associated with the ticket and "operable to be utilized by the customer to book a flight". Therefore, Oneda does not cure the deficiencies of Walker with regard to independent claims 1, 34, and 44, and, accordingly, the rejection of dependent claims 12-13 and 39-40 under 35 USC 103 should be withdrawn.

Newly filed dependent claims 50-51, 52-54, and 55-56, which depend from independent claims 1, 34, and 44, respectively, are directed to an expiration date associated with the pre-paid airline ticket, where the customer is able to book a flight using the pre-paid airline ticket up to and including the expiration date. Support for these claims may be found in the originally filed application in FIGs. 1, 2A - 2D, 8A, and 9C and associated description in the specification. None of the art of record teaches an expiration date associated with a pre-paid airline ticket to be

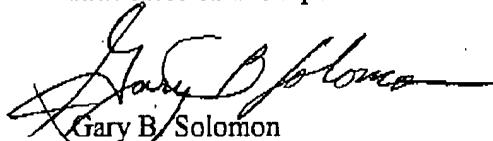
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used by the customer to book a flight. Therefore, newly filed dependent claims 50-56 should be allowable for at least the same reasons as independent claims 1, 34, and 44, and as set forth above. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully requests that claims 50-56 be found allowable over the art of record.

In view of the above, it is believed that this application is in condition for allowance, and such a Notice is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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EXHIBIT "A" - CLAIMS MARKED TO SHOW CHANGES

1        1. (Amended) A pre-paid airline ticket comprising a record of an advance-purchase  
2        of an airline ticket for a fixed price [that may be used by] to be utilized by a customer to book a  
3        flight, the pre-paid airline ticket including an identifier, the identifier uniquely identifying the  
4        pre-paid airline ticket and operable to be utilized by the customer to book a flight, and,  
5        associated with the identifier, a plurality of geographic flight parameters and a plurality of non-  
6        geographic flight parameters, at least one of the plurality of geographic flight parameters being  
7        [an] unspecified [geographic flight parameter].

1        34. (Amended) A method for providing pre-paid airline tickets comprising:  
2                storing a plurality of ticket options in a ticket option database, each ticket option  
3        comprising a ticket price and a plurality of flight parameters, at least one of the plurality of flight  
4        parameters being a geographic flight parameter [an unspecified geographic flight parameter];  
5                presenting the ticket options to a customer;  
6                receiving a ticket selection from the customer;  
7                receiving a payment from the customer, the payment being equal to the ticket  
8        price;  
9                associating a unique identifier with the selected ticket option;  
10               storing the unique identifier and the associated ticket option; and  
11               providing a pre-paid airline ticket to the customer, the pre-paid airline ticket  
12        comprising a record of the unique identifier operable to be utilized by the customer to book a

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13 flight and a record of one or more of the plurality of [geographic] flight parameters, at least one  
14 of the at least one geographic flight parameter being unspecified.

1 44. (Amended) A computer program embodied on a computer-readable medium for  
2 providing pre-paid airline tickets using a pre-paid ticket identifier database, the database  
3 comprising a plurality of records, each record including a plurality of fields, the plurality of  
4 fields comprising:

5 an identifier field, the identifier field including an identifier that uniquely  
6 identifies a pre-paid airline ticket and operable to be utilized by a customer to book a flight; and

7 a plurality of geographic flight parameter fields and a plurality of non-geographic  
8 flight parameter fields, at least one of the plurality of geographic flight parameter fields  
9 including an [unspecified] geographic flight parameter being unspecified.